

The Most Revd and Rt Hon Justin Welby

Archbishop of Canterbury

Lambeth Palace

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Via email: dominic.goodall@lambethpalace.org.uk

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for leave.

I write to you both in the absence of an Archbishop of Wales following the retirement of John Davies last month.

I have no doubt that you will have seen the recent reports of Twitter comments made by the Bishop of St David's about Conservative Party members and supporters.

I know that we all support freedom of expression and the ancient right of our citizens (including the Clergy) to use the written and spoken word to challenge and criticize our political leaders. However, Dr Penberthy's comments seem to fall well wide of that objective. One post-election comment is especially illustrative: "A very sad indictment of the British electorate is that so many still want to vote Tory. Absolutely appalling. I am ashamed of each and every one of you".

Dr Penberthy's Pembrokeshire Cathedral sits in a region represented by two Conservative MPs (me being one) who achieved more than 50% of the vote share in the recent General Election and two Conservative Senedd members elected just a few weeks ago. The Bishop's comments are therefore especially mystifying. They have proved hurtful to the party's members, representatives, supporters and voters to read such unprovoked criticism of their integrity from a senior figure in Welsh public life, particularly at a time when you have been urging the need to pull together as we recover from a global pandemic.

Furthermore, with every passing day we are learning more and more about the many risks associated with inappropriate online comment, not only as far as individuals are concerned but also what impact that this has on divisiveness and discrimination in society as whole. In our own ways we are all trying to understand what drives that and how we can arrest it. It therefore concerns me greatly that Dr Penberthy felt it appropriate to use her social media platform for divisive, ill-informed comments. It does

not reflect well on the Church in Wales' reputation for tolerance and inclusiveness; clergy should surely be responsible as well as challenging when engaging with politics - and respect the diversity of opinion in modern Britain.

It is disappointing that Dr Penberthy does not seem to appreciate or respect the fact that many of the Church in Wales' staunchest supporters may have political views that are at odds with her own. They exercise these after careful consideration and do not take kindly to being collectively abused online for so doing.

I appreciate and recognise that the Bishop has apologised, although this does little to restore faith in her judgment. I am, however, interested in what your plans are as leader of the Anglican Church to ensure that such situations can be avoided in the future.

It is my intention to publish this exchange on receipt of your response.

Your Sincerely .
Simon Hart

Rt Hon Simon Hart MP
Secretary of State for Wales
Ysgrifennydd Gwladol Cymru

Cc Simon Lloyd, Chief Executive, The Church in Wales